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Leaks May Be Inevitable In the Ship Of State

By RICHARD BURT

WASHINGTON — President Carter's "open Administration" seemed to become a little more closed last week when he told a press conference that he expected aides to support his foreign policy decisions with "loyalty and enthusiasm." Mr. Carter, unhappy over the publicity given to internal criticism of the Administration's policies in the Iranian crisis, said "it was not always appropriate" for Government officials to comment on policy.

All Presidents have complained about leaks to the press. And White House officials were quick to note that unlike at least one of his predecessors, Mr. Carter had not resorted to tapping telephones to catch offenders. But he is known to be highly vexed about the situation. A few days before his press conference he called in about 20 State Department officials and reportedly told them that if they could not support his policies, he would get rid of them.

Some observers have begun to ask whether the difficulty is really one of disloyal or talkative aides. They suggest that the leaks reflect the Administration's continuing troubles in reaching foreign policy decisions and explaining them to the public.

"The problem," said a State Department aide, "is not that we don't support Administration policies; it's that it isn't always clear what the policies are."

The harsher critics contend that the effort to stifle leaks is designed to mask an inability to set a course of action and stick to it. Thus, the Administration's apparent helplessness last week in the face of an attack on the American Embassy in Teheran and the killing of the American Ambassador in Afghanistan reinforced the impression on Capitol Hill and elsewhere that the White House is less than resolute.

A popular explanation for this evident indecisiveness is that Mr. Carter's two senior advisers on foreign policy, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the presidential assistant for national security, fundamentally disagree over America's role in the world. They are said to be locked in a struggle for Mr. Carter's "soul" on critical problems. Mr. Vance is depicted as a cool, rational force urging restraint and caution, especially in relations with the Soviet Union; Mr. Brzezinski as a tough-minded, slightly impulsive character, inclined, as one White House aide put it, "to look for every opportunity to tweak the nose of the bear."

So it becomes easy — maybe too easy — to conclude that the President has been caught in a cross-fire between Mr. Vance's State Department and Mr. Brzezinski's National Security Council, leading him to tilt toward the advice of first one and then the other. Experienced observers in and out of the Administration's foreign policy apparatus say this assumption is overdrawn. They acknowledge that there are deep differences within the Administration, but they maintain

rarely take the form of a Vance-Brzezinski

The reality is said to be far less neat than that, with many high-level and middle-level aides competing to get their message to the Oval Office.

In this view, Mr. Carter is a victim of his own intentions. Reacting to the experience of the Nixon-Ford period in which Henry Kissinger dominated foreign policy, the President chose a system of decision-making that encouraged broad participation. Mr. Vance and Mr. Brzezinski were not the only ones invited to help shape policy. Vice President Mondale, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Andrew J. Young, the chief delegate to the United Nations, Secretary of Energy James R. Schlesinger and Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, were all encouraged in early 1977 to participate in a "collegial" approach to policy-making.

Two years later, it is arguable that Mr. Carter may have gone too far. As nice as it sounded in theory, officials concede that it has not been easy to achieve collegiality on controversial issues. In some cases, such as American policy in the Iranian crisis, the approach led to bureaucratic compromises that made Administration positions seem indecisive. In others, such as relations with Moscow, Administration policy has been buffeted by internal disagreement.

Some officials blame Mr. Brzezinski, arguing that his strong views and activist style are not in keeping with the "team effort" sought by Mr. Carter. Rather than attempting to dominate the policy process, they suggest, Mr. Brzezinski should study the style of McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's national security adviser in the mid-1960's. Mr. Bundy, they recall, did not push particular policies; he saw his job as one of making sure that the opinions of key Cabinet officers got through to the President.

Mr. Brzezinski's defenders acknowledge that reticence is not one of his traits, but they also contend that of all Mr. Carter's principal aides, he alone has a conceptual grasp of world politics. They note, for example, Mr. Carter's emphasis, in his State of the Union speech, on making policy that "will not stifle inevitable change, but will influence its course in helpful and constructive ways" — a reflection of Mr. Brzezinski's strong conviction that the United States cannot afford simply to protect the international status quo.

But Mr. Brzezinski does not always get his way, and some officials believe that this is the key to understanding the Administration's difficulties. They say that the antagonist often is not Mr. Vance, but several Vance lieutenants who worry that Mr. Brzezinski's tough stand could endanger a new strategic arms treaty with the Soviet Union and other opportunities for establishing a more cooperative relationship with Moscow.

Mr. Vance is said to share the views of his aides, but to dislike bureaucratic feuding. When he does take a strong stand, he usually gets his way, as was demonstrated last summer when he resisted the idea of cutting off the sale of oil technology to the Soviet Union. The result, according to some officials, is an unpredictable situation in which Mr. Brzezinski is able to call the shots until Mr. Vance decides to step in.

White House officials say, however, that it is ultimately the President, not Mr. Vance or Mr. Brzezinski, who runs American foreign policy. And despite Mr. Carter's remarks last week, they maintain that he is still dedicated to the idea of obtaining, as he said in his press conference, "the widest possible range of advice and counsel."